

NEWS RELEASE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

Commissioner Claire DeMatteis

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DOC announces inmate death as it initiates additional proactive testing and marks new recoveries

Dover, DE -- The Delaware Department of Correction (DOC) today announced that **James Waller**, a 75 year-old inmate with underlying health conditions from James T. Vaughn Correctional Center (JTVCC), died this afternoon, April 30 at Bayhealth Hospital, Kent Campus from complications from heart disease, hypertension, diabetes and COVID. Waller was part of a minimum security housing unit that has been closely monitored since April 8, with twice daily temperature checks and proactive COVID-19 testing that returned a negative result. When Waller registered a fever on April 26, he was immediately moved to the prison infirmary and a rapid COVID test was administered, which was returned positive. He was admitted to Bayhealth Hospital, Kent Campus later that same day. In recent days Waller's condition deteriorated and he had been receiving palliative care since April 29. Waller's body has been released to the Delaware Division of Forensic Science, which will determine the cause of death.

Waller, of Laurel, DE, has been in DOC custody since 1978 and was serving a life sentence for 1st Degree Murder.

Additionally, the DOC today announced that **a total of 14 inmates have recovered from COVID-19**, including 3 new recoveries in addition to 11 announced since last week. Recovered inmates are initially housed in a transitional housing unit in the JTVCC COVID-19 treatment center before being returned to their original housing units. Several correctional officers and probation officers also have fully recovered from the illness.

These recoveries come as DOC is preparing to conduct 40 additional proactive tests of asymptomatic inmates in a medium security building at JTVCC. DOC remains in the second week of an intensive two-week operation to combat COVID-19 within the two facilities where positive inmate COVID cases have occurred, building on the daily temperature checks and close monitoring of more than 1,750 inmates at these facilities. This targeted operation is concentrated in buildings at James T. Vaughn Correctional Center (JTVCC) and Sussex Community Corrections Center (SCCC) that have experienced COVID cases and includes:

- Twice daily inmate temperature checks for more than 1,750 inmates;
- Distribution of face masks to all inmates at JTVCC and SCCC, bringing to more than 2,100 the number of inmates issued face masks across correctional facilities;
- Expanded proactive inmate COVID testing;

- Increased use of specialized cleaning, on top of the current twice-daily cleanings, utilizing a disinfecting machine that employs an airborne mist to sterilize entire rooms;
- Voluntary COVID testing to all Officers at JTVCC and SCCC in recognition of the continued risk of infection from outside as community spread continues.

"We have administered more than 200 inmate COVID tests, including 140 proactive inmate tests, as part of our aggressive efforts to contain COVID within two buildings at one prison facility in Smyrna and one community corrections facility in Georgetown," **said Commissioner Claire DeMatteis**. "We are saddened that an inmate we had been actively monitoring for three weeks has passed away today from complications from underlying health conditions and COVID. We continue our comprehensive protocol of testing, temperature checks, screenings, intensive cleanings and minimizing movement to combat this virus. We are optimistic that the number of recoveries continues to grow."

Review an informational chart of positive COVID-19 cases among DOC employees, contracted staff and inmates for each DOC facility by [clicking HERE](#). The latest positive test results are as follows:

- **Five inmates from a minimum security building at JTVCC who were identified and isolated at the first sign of illness through proactive monitoring**, including twice daily forehead temperature checks. *Three test results came through rapid COVID testing administered and processed on-site at JTVCC on April 29 through a partnership with the Delaware Division of Public Health; two test results came from tests administered and received this week.* All five inmates have been moved to the JTVCC COVID-19 treatment center.
- **Three Correctional Officers assigned to JTVCC.** Two Officers were last on duty 10 days ago - on April 20, and one was last on duty 6 days ago - on April 24, respectively. All Officers have been required to wear face masks since April 10 while on duty. After beginning to experience flu-like symptoms, the Officers began to self-isolate at home, and as symptoms developed sought medical attention, at which time COVID-19 tests were administered. The positive COVID-19 test results were received by the Officers on April 28, April 30 and April 29, respectively and subsequently verified by the DOC. Two officers continue to self-isolate at home and one is being treated in an area hospital in stable condition.
- **Two Correctional Officer cadets assigned to the Lt. Steven Floyd Training Academy.** The Officer cadets were last on duty 6 days ago - on April 14 and 3 days ago - on April 27, respectively. All Academy cadets are required to wear face masks and practice social distancing. After beginning to experience flu-like symptoms, the cadets began to self-isolate at home, and as symptoms developed sought medical attention, at which time COVID-19 tests were administered. The positive COVID-19 test results were received by the cadets on April 28 and April 30, respectively, and subsequently verified by the DOC.

No additional information will be provided about the identity of the inmates, officers, or cadets for privacy protection.

Note: The Department of Correction is doubling the safeguards recommended by the CDC to determine when inmates have recovered from COVID-19 and are safe to be taken out of isolation, by requiring that 14 days, rather than 7 days, have passed since the positive COVID test was administered, that 3 days have passed during which the patient remains fever and symptom-free AND that a follow up COVID test returns negative. For inmates with immunocompromised underlying health issues, DOC has adopted an even stricter recovery standard of 21 days.

The DOC is employing a variety of prevention, screening, cleaning and containment measures to guard against the spread of the novel coronavirus, including:

- All persons, including Officers, administrative staff and probationers who enter any Level V prison, Level IV violation of probation or work release center, or Probation and Parole Office are screened for COVID-19, including a series of questions and a forehead temperature check with a thermometer
- Staff who present with symptoms are sent home to self-quarantine and directed to contact their health care provider.
- Newly arriving inmates are held in isolation for the first 14 days, during which they are carefully monitored, including daily temperature checks with a thermometer.
- DOC has implemented extra daily cleaning of DOC facilities and is using specialized fogging machines to disinfect entire rooms of common areas, housing units and workspaces.
- Face masks are being worn by Correctional Officers and contract healthcare workers as a protection for inmates, Officers and other employees. All Correctional Officers have been wearing face masks since April 10. Face masks have been provided to inmates who are in infirmaries, those with compromised immune systems, those with certain institutional jobs, such as food service, and all inmates at the only two DOC facilities with inmate COVID cases - the James T. Vaughn Correctional Center and the Sussex Community Corrections Center.
- Most Probationer visits with Probation Officers were transitioned to phone check-ins in March to support social distancing measures.

In addition, the DOC has temporarily suspended in-person prison programming to reduce the movement of people into facilities and movement of groups of people within facilities. Certain programs, including treatment and education programs and religious programming, are being transitioned to a virtual video format. Inmates continue to have outside recreation opportunities within their confined areas and continue to have access to phones to stay in regular contact with their loved ones. DOC is also expanding the use of electronic tablets among the inmate population, where available.

Get updated information about the DOC's response to COVID-19 and read previous announcements of positive COVID-19 cases by visiting <https://doc.delaware.gov>, and follow *decorrection* on Facebook and Twitter.

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